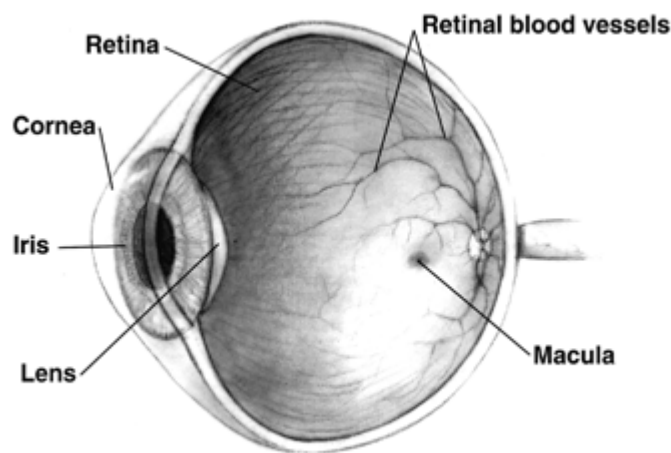


AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION (AMD)

WHAT IS AMD?

AMD occurs when the cells in the macula, the central portion of the back of the eye that senses light, break down. The macula is responsible for clear, sharp vision. Over 1.7 million Americans have some form of AMD. It is the leading cause of vision loss among Americans ages 65 and over.



WHAT CAUSES AMD?

The cause of AMD is unknown. AMD rarely leads to blindness, but often causes severe, irreversible loss of central vision.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

AMD does not cause any pain. Depending on the type you have (“wet” or “dry”), you may experience the following:

- **Dry AMD:** affects about 90% of those with the disease. Slowly, the light sensitive cells in the macula break down. It often occurs in just one eye at first. You may get the disease later in the other eye. The most common symptoms are:
 - Slightly blurred vision

-Blurred spot in the center of your vision

- **Wet AMD:** Although only 10% of all people with AMD have this type, it accounts for 90% of all severe vision loss from the disease. It occurs when new blood vessels behind the retina start to grow toward the macular. Because the new blood vessels are very fragile, they will often leak blood and fluid under the macula. This causes rapid damage to the macula and can lead to loss of central vision in a short period of time. The most common symptoms are:

-Straight line appears wavy

-Rapid loss of central vision.



Normal Vision



AMD Vision

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS?

Age and a family history of AMD are the biggest risk factors. People over age 60 are at the highest risk. Other risk factors include:

- Gender (Women may be at greater risk than men)
- Race (Whites are more prone to lose vision from AMD than Blacks)
- Smoking

HOW IS AMD DIAGNOSED?

Eye care professionals detect AMD during an eye examination that includes:

- **Visual acuity test:** This eye chart test measures how well you see at various distances.

- **Pupil dilation:** Drops are placed into the eye to dilate (widen) the pupil. This allows the eye care specialist to see more of the retina of the eye.
- **Fluorescein Angiography:** A special dye is injected into a vein in your arm. Pictures are taken as the dye passes through the blood vessels in the retina.

HOW IS AMD TREATED?

Treatment depends on the type of AMD you have:

- **Dry AMD:** There is currently no treatment available. Fortunately dry AMD develops very slowly. You may lose some of your central vision over the years however; most people are able to lead normal, active lives.
- **Wet AMD:** Some cases of wet AMD can be treated with laser surgery.

WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT AMD?

There is no way to prevent AMD; however, people in the high-risk group should have their eyes examined at least every two years.

REFERENCES / LINKS:

National Eye Institute:

http://www.nei.nih.gov/health/maculardegen/armd_risk.htm

Prevent Blindness America

http://www.preventblindness.org/eye_problems/doc_checklist.html

US Food and Drug Administration: FDA Consumer Magazine

http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2002/202_eyes.html

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER



When you call to make an appointment:

- Be prepared to describe any vision problems you are having.
- Ask if you will be able to drive yourself home. Will the eye examination affect you temporarily?

Before you go in for your examination

Make a list of the following:

- Signs or symptoms of eye problems that you have noticed (flashes of light, difficulty seeing at night, temporary double vision, loss of vision, for example)
- Eye injuries or eye surgery you have had (approximate dates and where you were treated)
- Prescription and over-the-counter drugs you are taking.
- Questions about your vision.
- Your general health condition (allergies, chronic health problems, operations)
- Family history of eye problems (glaucoma, cataracts, etc.)

Take along the following:

- Your glasses, contact lenses or both
- Prescription and over-the-counter drugs you are taking

During the examination:

- Asks questions about anything that seems unclear to you, such as the names and purposes of tests you may undergo.
- Ask if there are any changes since your last exam.
- Asks when it is best to call the doctor with questions.

- Find out when you should return for your next exam.

General Questions To Ask About Your Vision:

- What changes can I expect in my vision?
- Will my vision loss get worse? How much of my vision will I lose
- Will regular eyeglasses improve my vision?
- What medical/surgical treatments are available for my condition?
- What can I do to protect or prolong my vision?
- Will diet, exercise or other lifestyle change help?
- If my vision can't be corrected, can you refer me to a specialist in low vision?
- Where can I get vision rehabilitation?
- Will any special devices help me with daily activities like reading, sewing, cooking, or fixing things around the house?
- What training and services are available to help me live better and more safely with vision problems?

There are two key people on your health care team, you and your health care provider. You are just as important as your provider in directing your health care. The first step you should take in becoming an active team member of your health care team is to understand what you are being treated for and why. Continue to ask questions until you understand the answer. By paying attention to your health and maintaining your own records, you will become an active, informed decision maker in your health care.



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